## SPECIFICATION

# TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

BE IT KNOWN THAT I, Naoyuki Koizumi, a citizen of Japan residing at Nagano-shi, Nagano, Japan has invented certain new and useful improvements in

SEMICONDUCTOR CHIP AND FABRICATION METHOD THEREOF

of which the following is a specification : -

#### TITLE OF THE INVENTION

SEMICONDUCTOR CHIP AND FABRICATION METHOD THEREOF

#### 5 BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

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1. Field of the Invention

The present invention is related to a method of fabricating semiconductor chips by dicing a semiconductor wafer at a predetermined size.

2. Description of the Related Art

In a conventional semiconductor chip fabrication process, a semiconductor wafer, on which a plurality of semiconductor elements are formed, is diced in a dicing process of the fabrication process by shifting a rotationally-driven disk-shaped cutter (dicing blade) of a semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus vertically and horizontally so as to form a large number of semiconductor chips. In general, such semiconductor chips are box-shaped.

In the above-mentioned conventional semiconductor chip fabrication process, since a dicing blade of a semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus is shifted vertically and horizontally to dice a semiconductor wafer, the semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus has to perform a greater number of cutting operations as more semiconductor chips are formed from the semiconductor wafer. Thus, it takes more dicing time to produce more semiconductor chips.

In addition, when a dicing blade is used in the dicing process, it is necessary to prepare a passage area (dicing line width) for the dicing blade between adjacent semiconductor chips in a semiconductor wafer. In general, an interval between adjacent semiconductor chips has to be set as more than the dicing line width of about 50  $\mu$ m, and this requirement adversely influences high-

density semiconductor chip formation on a semiconductor wafer. Furthermore, a semiconductor wafer has been recently made thinner down to about 50  $\mu$ m. Such a thin semiconductor wafer is fragile to a dicing blade.

In addition, when a semiconductor wafer is diced to form semiconductor chips, the diced semiconductor chips are box-shaped. Such a box-shaped semiconductor chip has a significant problem in that a corner and an edge of the semiconductor chip may be chipped when the semiconductor chip is handled or carried, resulting in yield reduction thereof.

## 15 SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

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It is a general object of the present invention to provide a novel and useful semiconductor chip and fabrication method thereof in which one or more of the above-mentioned problems are eliminated.

A more specific object of the present invention is to provide a method of fabricating a semiconductor chip that can shorten fabrication time and improve integration and yield of semiconductor chip formation.

In order to achieve the above-mentioned objects, there is provided according to one aspect of the present invention a method of fabricating a semiconductor chip from a semiconductor wafer having a first surface supporting a semiconductor element and a second surface opposite the first surface, the method including the steps of: performing isotropic etching at least partially on a cutting portion of the semiconductor wafer from one or both of the first surface and the second surface; and performing anisotropic etching on a remaining portion of the cutting portion from the one or both of the first

surface and the second surface, thereby cutting the cutting portion of the semiconductor wafer.

In an embodiment of the present invention, the method may further include the step of: forming a resist on the first surface to expose the cutting portion on the first surface, when the cutting portion is isotropically etched from the first surface.

In an embodiment of the present invention, the resist may have rounded-off corners.

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In an embodiment of the present invention, the method may further include the step of: forming a resist on the second surface to expose the cutting portion on the second surface, when the cutting portion is isotropically etched from the second surface.

In an embodiment of the present invention, the resist may have rounded-off corners.

Additionally, there is provided according
to another aspect of the present invention a
semiconductor chip fabricated from a semiconductor
wafer, including: a first surface supporting a
semiconductor element; a second surface opposite the
first surface, wherein at least one of the first
surface and the second surface has rounded-off edges.

In an embodiment of the present invention, the semiconductor chip may further include notched side surfaces.

Additionally, there is provided according to another aspect of the present invention a semiconductor chip fabricated from a semiconductor wafer, including: a plurality of rounded-off corners.

According to one aspect of the present invention, when a semiconductor wafer is diced, it is possible to etch the surfaces of the semiconductor wafer by performing isotropic etching and anisotropic etching. Accordingly, it is

possible to shorten time required to fabricate semiconductor chips from the semiconductor wafer. In addition, since the semiconductor chip fabrication method according to the present invention does not need a dicing blade for dicing a semiconductor wafer, it is unnecessary to prepare a dicing line width corresponding to a dicing blade and reduce the dicing line width. As a result, it is possible to enhance integration of semiconductor 10 chips on the semiconductor wafer, that is, it is possible to produce more semiconductor chips from the semiconductor wafer. In addition, since isotropic etching may be performed on a cutting portion from a first surface, on which at least one 15 semiconductor element is formed, of a semiconductor wafer or a second surface opposite the first surface, it is possible to round off one or both edges of the first surface and the second surface. configuration makes it possible to prevent chipping of the edge when the semiconductor chip is handled, 20 and it is possible to improve yield of semiconductor chips.

Other objects, features and advantages of the present invention will become more apparent from the following detailed description when read in conjunction with the accompanying drawings.

### BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

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- FIG. 1 is a diagram illustrating a first

  30 fabrication process of a semiconductor chip
  according to an embodiment of the present invention;
  FIG. 2 is a top view of a resist used in
  the first fabrication process according to the
  embodiment;
- FIG. 3 is a diagram illustrating a second fabrication process of the semiconductor chip according to the embodiment;

- FIG. 4 is a diagram illustrating a third fabrication process of the semiconductor chip according to the embodiment;
- FIG. 5 is a diagram illustrating a fourth fabrication process of the semiconductor chip according to the embodiment;
  - FIG. 6 is a diagram illustrating a fifth fabrication process of the semiconductor chip according to the embodiment;
- FIG. 7 is a perspective view of the semiconductor chip according to the embodiment;
  - $\,$  FIG. 8 is a cross-sectional view of the semiconductor chip according to the embodiment from a side viewpoint thereof; and
- FIG. 9 is a cross-sectional view of the semiconductor chip according to the embodiment from a top viewpoint thereof.

## DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

- In the following, embodiments of the present invention will be described with reference to the accompanying drawings.
- FIG. 1 shows a first fabrication process of a semiconductor chip according to an embodiment 25 of the present invention. In the first fabrication process, a semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus fixes a semiconductor wafer 100, which is made of silicon and includes two surfaces: an element formation surface (upper side in FIG. 1) having a 30 plurality of semiconductor elements 102 thereon and an element non-formation surface (lower side in FIG. 1) opposite to the element formation surface, by attaching the element non-formation surface of the semiconductor wafer 100 to a tape 200 as illustrated in FIG. 1. 35
  - In addition, the semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus provides a resist film on the

element formation surface. Then, by exposing the resist film to light, the semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus removes the portion of the resist film on a cutting area of the semiconductor Specifically, if the resist film is a wafer 100. positive resist, the semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus provides a mask having a plurality of rectangular holes above the resist film. This mask is designed to expose a portion to be left of the 10 resist film. The semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus illuminates light on the resist film through the mask from above and then dissolves the resist film. As a result, it is possible to remove only the portion of the resist film where the light 15 is not illuminated. On the other hand, if the resist film is a negative resist, the semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus provides a mask having a plurality of rectangles above the resist film. mask is designed to expose a portion to be removed 20 of the resist film. The semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus illuminates light on the resist film through the mask from above and then dissolves the resist film. As a result, it is possible to remove the portion of the resist film 25 where the light was illuminated.

When the resist film on the cutting portion of the semiconductor wafer 100 is removed in this manner, resists 300 to expose the cutting portion of the semiconductor wafer 100 are formed on the semiconductor wafer 100. FIG. 2 is a top view of a resist 300. As shown in FIG. 2, the four corners of the resist 300 are rounded off. In a positive-type resist film, such a resist film 300 can be formed by rounding off four corners of each hole on the above-mentioned mask for the positive resist. In a negative-type resist film, on the other hand, such a resist film 300 can be formed by

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rounding off four corners of each rectangular of the above-mentioned mask for the negative resist.

FIG. 3 shows a second fabrication process of the semiconductor chip according to the embodiment of the present invention. In the second fabrication process, the semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus performs an isotropic etching for the exposed portion of the semiconductor wafer 100, that is, the cutting portion of the semiconductor wafer 100. Specifically, the semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus exposes the semiconductor wafer 100 in atmosphere of a reactive gas.

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The reactive gas is absorbed by the 15 exposed portion of the semiconductor wafer 100 and chemically reacts with silicon of the exposed portion. The chemical reaction of the reactive gas and the silicon proceeds at basically the same speed in all directions, and a volatile material is 20 produced by the chemical reaction. Accordingly, since the exposed silicon together with the portion thereof under the resist 300 is removed at the same speed for all directions, it is possible to form an isotropic etched groove 110 in the semiconductor 25 wafer 100, which groove 110 has a cross-section that is bowl-shaped from the side viewpoint of the semiconductor wafer 100 as illustrated in FIG. 3. After the groove 110 is formed into a predetermined shape, the semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus 30 moves to a third fabrication process.

FIG. 4 shows the third fabrication process for the semiconductor chip according to the embodiment of the present invention. In the third fabrication process, the semiconductor chip fabrication apparatus performs anisotropic etching on the exposed portion of the semiconductor wafer 100, that is, the cutting portion of the

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fig. 9 is a cross-sectional view thereof.

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fabrication method according to the embodiment of the present invention employs isotropic etching and anisotropic etching to etch the surfaces of the semiconductor wafer 100. As a result, it is possible to reduce the dicing time for the 5 semiconductor wafer 100, that is, the fabrication time of the semiconductor chip 500. In addition, it is unnecessary to prepare the dicing line width corresponding to the width of a dicing blade and shorten the dicing line width unlike in the case 10 where the dicing blade is used to dice the semiconductor wafer 100. As a result, it is possible to enhance integration of the semiconductor chips 500 on the semiconductor wafer 100, that is, it is possible to produce more semiconductor chips 15 500 from the semiconductor wafer 100. In addition, since isotropic etching is performed for the cutting portion from both of the element formation surface and the element non-formation surface of the semiconductor wafer 100, it is possible to form 20 semiconductor chips 500 having rounded-off outer edges with respect to both of the element formation surface and the element non-formation surface. As a result, chipping of the outer edges can be prevented when the semiconductor chips 500 are handled, and, 25 accordingly, it is possible to improve yield of the semiconductor chips 500. In addition, anisotropic etching is performed to round off corners of each resist 300 on an element formation surface and corners of each resist 301 on an element non-30 formation surface from the upper side of the cutting portion of the semiconductor wafer 100. Accordingly, it is possible to round off outer edges of side surfaces of the semiconductor chip 500. As a result, chipping of the outer edges can be prevented when 35 the semiconductor chip 500 is handled, and, accordingly, it is possible to improve yield of the

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